

English Bridge

Useful Conventions

by David Bakhshi



The Jacoby 2NT convention



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THIS month's convention, which shows a flat hand with support for opener's major suit, was the idea of one of the most famous bridge players of all time – the American star, Oswald Jacoby. Though it has achieved greater popularity across the Atlantic, an increasing number of Europeans now employ this very useful tool.

When is the Jacoby 2NT useful?

One of the areas that is particularly awkward for standard bidding involves hands that wish to raise to at least game, but do not contain a singleton or void (with a shortage, responder can make a Splinter Bid). The Jacoby 2NT provides a solution to this problem by replacing a relatively infrequent natural bid with a more useful artificial meaning.

Can one afford to give up a natural 2NT response?

Though it used to be considered reasonable to respond with a natural 2NT response to a 1♥/1♠ opening, modern bidding principles involve the idea that the responder should strain to bid a 'suit to a suit' where possible. Thus, the responder will initially prefer to bid a new (four-card) suit with sufficient strength to bid at the two level (weaker hands will still bid 1NT whether or not the partnership use 2NT as a Jacoby raise). If a fit has not been found following the opener's rebid, then the responder may follow up with a 2NT bid to show invitational values.

How does opener continue after responder has bid 2NT?

Whilst the original structure suggested by Jacoby is still popular in the United States, there are now many variations in use across the world. I am therefore going to focus on a scheme of continuations that has generally been adopted in this country. Once the responder bids 2NT, the partnership is committed to bidding to game, and thus turns its attention to the possibility of bidding for slam. It is therefore important for the opener to describe whether he has any slam interest, and if so, the type of hand that he holds. As we have seen previously, knowledge of a second potential source of tricks, or a side-suit shortage, are often the key to bidding good slams.

A typical scheme following the bidding principles that we have been using is as follows:

- A jump to game in our agreed major shows a minimum hand with no slam interest, with all other bids showing a non-minimum with some degree of enthusiasm for investigating slam.
- A 3NT rebid shows a balanced hand (15-19).
- A new suit at the lowest level is a Trial Bid (for slam).
- A jump in a new suit is a splinter.
- A rebid of the agreed major at the three level shows a non-minimum hand unsuitable for any other descriptive call, and is typically consistent with a six-card suit.

Here is an example of the Jacoby 2NT in action:

♠ A 6 3		♠ K Q 5
♥ K Q 7 5 4 2		♥ A 8 6 3
♦ 7		♦ J 8 6 2
♣ A 8 5		♣ K 3

West	East
1♥	2NT ¹
4♦ ²	4NT ³
5♣ ⁴	5♦ ⁵
6♥ ⁶	End

¹ Jacoby 2NT

² Splinter bid

³ Roman Key-Card Blackwood

⁴ 0 or 3 key cards

⁵ Do you have the ♥Q?

⁶ Yes, I have the ♥Q but no side kings

With a non-minimum hand and the ability to cooperate in a slam venture, the opener makes a splinter bid of 4♦. This bid transforms the responder's hand from a minimum game-force to a hand with huge slam potential. He thus continues with a bid of 4NT, leading to a relatively low point count small slam.

In summary:

- A natural 2NT response to an opening bid of 1♥/1♠ is relatively clumsy, and can be better utilised to show a game-forcing hand with at least four-card support for opener's suit. This also has the effect of removing the ambiguity of a direct raise to 4♥/4♠, which now becomes a more pre-emptive raise.
- Following a Jacoby raise, the opener should seek to describe his hand further with slam interest and sign off in four of the agreed major with a minimum hand.
- With a non-minimum, the opener can bid a new suit at the lowest level with a length holding (trial bid), or show a shortage holding by jumping in a new suit (splinter). □

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